

The information provided below addresses ongoing concerns by prairie dog advocates regarding the Armory relocation project (conveyed by Lisa Morzel to the HOTLINE on September 30, 2016). Contentions made in that message are provided below **in bold** with additional explanatory information provided by city staff.

Complete and up-to-date information about the Armory prairie dog relocation is available at the city's website: [www.bouldercolorado.gov/osmp/armory-prairie-dog-relocation](http://www.bouldercolorado.gov/osmp/armory-prairie-dog-relocation).

## **1. City not meeting any of the advocates requests in recent letter to council.**

Starting with the initial and significant request to redirect the use of city land to accommodate the Armory prairie dogs, 10 of the 13 requests from prairie dog advocates were either made part of or not precluded by the current plan. Therefore, the contention that the city has not met any of the advocates' request is not true. These requests are addressed in detail:

- The main request that was not possible was to grant prairie dog advocates access to the project sites to check on the prairie dogs throughout the relocation. While both sites and the activities on them are largely viewable from public roads, and thus available to advocates for monitoring, the Department of Public Health recommended no direct public access to the sites themselves to minimize impacts to the prairie dogs and the public. Furthermore, it was determined that the potential for ongoing distraction and disturbance to the animals from more people than was necessary during the relocation would potentially add stress and reduce survivorship. Finally, the owner of the Armory site did not want to afford additional access to the property for these same or potentially additional reasons, and the city has no authority or reason to force this to happen because of the ongoing cooperation with city staff.
- Advocates requested a pre-bait period of two weeks. The relocator will prebait the traps for no less than four days. Such period will be determined based on observations of prairie dog behavior and acclimation to the traps, previous experience of the relocator on pre-baiting necessary for successful trapping efforts, and the readiness of the receiving site. The period could be as much as two weeks, but likely a shorter time.
- Advocates requested that "Tru-Catch" traps be recommended as the preferred technology as they are safest for the animals. This was conveyed to the relocator by the city, but it was allowed that the relocator could also use traps they are accustomed to and have experienced success with. It has become clear through this process that different relocators use different equipment and methodology and the

highest success is obtained when they use methods and equipment that they are comfortable with and have experienced success with.

- Advocates requested that the project map the burrow configuration on the Armory site. This was requested by the city and is expected to occur to the greatest extent reasonably possible.
- Advocates requested that each cage be labeled with the coterie designation. This was requested by the city and is expected to occur to the greatest extent reasonably possible.
- Advocates asked that trapping start on 10/4/16. Trapping is planned to begin once the pre-baiting period is complete and the receiving site is ready to receive prairie dogs. The exact date is to be determined but is likely to be on or around 10/4, weather dependent.
- Advocates requested that cages be checked every 1.5 to 2 hours during the day – provided with shade and food. This was requested by the city and once trapping begins, the relocater will have an experienced wildlife biologist monitor prairie dog activity on the trap site, and release non-target wildlife and collect trapped prairie dogs as frequently as reasonably possible (expected at least once approx. every two hours). Once collected, traps containing prairie dogs will be covered and moved to a protected area to await transport to the release site.
- Advocates informed the city that B.R.C. 6-1-37(b) [August 2016 version] provides: The city manager or a designee shall be allowed to be present on the land from which a relocation is being made and on the land to which relocation is being made during the relocation procedures, and requested that city staff be present at both sites to monitor. The Armory landowner has indicated that city staff will have ongoing access to the sending site.
- Advocates recommended trapping for at least 2 weeks or until no prairie dogs are captured for 5 days. The plan is that the trapping will continue until all prairie dogs are captured, or until city staff (Urban Wildlife Coordinator) determines that trapping is finished (using 5 days of no captures as the indicator). Work by the relocater will continue as needed as their contract covers the relocation throughout its completion.
- Advocates requested that a technique called sudsing (a/k/a flushing), be used, if necessary to capture the last few prairie dogs at the Armory. City staff will not be arranging for this, but the Armory landowner was made aware of the interest in this

approach and the plan could allow for it. Advocates have been referred to the Armory landowner in case arrangements could be worked out to perform this activity. Flushing has not been required by the city, and is not expected to be necessary. It has not been required in the past on projects with high trapping success.

- Advocates advised that time allowed for sudsing is dependent on the number of prairie dogs remaining on capture site and also on weather so it may need to be done earlier in the month and therefore requested that pre-baiting start earlier than Oct. 1. This was conveyed to the relocater by the city, but the relocater was not available to begin prebaiting until October 1.
- Advocates requested that no poisons be used for final stragglers remaining on-site after sudsing terminates: Either leave final stragglers on site or use carbon monoxide with a subcontractor that is not the relocater. Carbon monoxide, if necessary, will be applied by a licensed fumigation company determined by the Armory landowner. No "stragglers" will be left on site.

**2. City providing 5 nest tubes & shallow existing burrows that will only accommodate 70-80 of the 130+ Armory p-dogs.**

This is not accurate. The relocation site is an excellent site for establishing a prairie dog colony. It was previously occupied by prairie dogs. In the immediate area for relocation, there have been at least 33 burrows located in a variety of conditions ranging from currently covered over with soil to being five feet or more deep. In addition to these opportunities for the prairie dogs to naturally re-open past burrows, the city is installing 6 nest boxes. The plan posted at [www.bouldercolorado.gov/osmp/armory-prairie-dog-relocation](http://www.bouldercolorado.gov/osmp/armory-prairie-dog-relocation) can accommodate 92-140 prairie dogs in existing, intact natural burrows or artificial nest boxes depending on the age structure of the colony. There are an estimated 90-120 prairie dogs on the Armory site.

**3. [The Armory landowner is] not allowing sudsing for stragglers, just lethal control.**

This has not been determined yet. Until the trapping has run its course, it is not possible to determine what, if any activities will be necessary to remove remaining prairie dogs. The landowner is aware of options and these will be discussed with city staff.

- 4. [The Armory landowner is] not allowing any observers/volunteers @ Armory. City not allowing any members of the public on release site even after several of us became HSUS vetted volunteers & are willing to sign liability waivers.**

This is true as noted and explained above.

- 5. City staff is full of apathy re p-dogs & is not interested in survival of Armory colony (except for trying unsuccessfully to appease public outcry).**

This is false. City staff shares the goal of a full and successful relocation and has invested considerable time and resources to make this happen. The city has dedicated wildlife ecologists on staff who are experienced at managing wildlife populations on city lands including thousands of acres of prairie dogs and associated species. The city approach takes into consideration the entire ecosystem, including prairie dogs. The prairie dogs are considered wild animals, not domestic animals, and are being introduced into a well-functioning ecosystem that includes predation, disease, and over-grazing among other risks. The City shares with the concerned members of the community the goal of a successful relocation and is moving forward toward this goal.

- 6. City also not too interested in outcome of relocation of the 250 p-dogs from city land to So Grasslands as city is contracting w Smith Environmental (similar to Roe) to do that relocation this fall & in 2017 but with an unprepared release site & no nest boxes.... only the outdated & proven ineffective & inhumane augured holes & existing very shallow & mostly unusable burrows.**

City staff differ from the advocates in their view of the resilience of prairie dogs. Staff believe that the preference of everyone is for prairie dogs to dig their own burrows in the manner best suited to prairie dogs. Where people differ is in the extent they are willing to go to artificially support relocated prairie dog colonies. It is a natural inclination to want to do something, but that is not always necessarily the best approach when dealing with wild animals. City staff do plan to relocate an additional approximately 100 prairie dogs from an irrigated hayfield on city land and a few remaining prairie dogs from Foothills park to an area about 100 yards from the Armory relocation site in the southern grasslands. The city has contracted with a company to do this work who the City has previously worked successfully with on prairie dog relocation. The relocation will be done in accordance with city plans and to a prepared site, though not prepared with nest boxes as advocates wish, but using methods (including augured underground burrows and existing natural, open burrows) that the City has previously experienced led to successful establishment of relocated prairie dogs on a different receiving site. City staff are confident that the relocation will be successful and will not unduly harm prairie dogs.

As mentioned above, further information will be provided as these relocations proceed on the city website at [www.bouldercolorado.gov/osmp/armory-prairie-dog-relocation](http://www.bouldercolorado.gov/osmp/armory-prairie-dog-relocation). Also, in response to these and other concerns raised by the community, staff has been planning to form a technical workgroup later this year to examine best practices for prairie dog management in detail.